

ALTERNATIVES

ACTIONS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The law that directed the preparation of this feasibility study includes the provision that the study is to “make recommendations concerning the suitability and feasibility of establishing an international historical park where the trail crosses the United States-Mexico border at Maverick County, Texas, and Guerrero, Mexico” (National Trails System Act, section 5(c)(36)(B)(v)).

The University of Texas conducted studies in the mid-1970s to understand the archeology and ethnohistory of the 18th century mission complex of San Juan Bautista at what today is Guerrero, Coahuila, Mexico. An international committee is now working to protect and interpret the sites in Guerrero. On the basis of this research (known as the “Gateway Project”), there has been interest in a proposed Gateway Park in the Guerrero-Maverick County area.

The routes of El Camino Real in Maverick County are entirely on private lands. There are no published surveys identifying trail-related resources on these private lands. Archeological sites have been identified on private lands, but the landowners do not want any public use of the sites.

A trail-related facility could be developed in Eagle Pass in association with Fort Duncan, where there are a number of tourism and interpretive opportunities. However, such facilities would not be certified by the National Park Service because there are no sites directly related to El Camino Real in Eagle Pass.

There also are opportunities to work with Mexico to locate an international historical park in that country. The National Park Service would work with landowners on both sides of the border to identify, document, and protect trail-related resources and, where appropriate, provide opportunities for public use.

If congressional legislation is proposed to designate El Camino Real de los Tejas or the Old San Antonio Road, or both, as national historic trails, it is recommended that such a proposal include a provision limiting any future federal land acquisition along the route to a willing seller basis. Such a provision was included in the legislation designating the Santa Fe National Historic Trail, as well as in the legislation designating other national historic trails. Little, if any, federal land acquisition is anticipated at this time.

ALTERNATIVE 1: DESIGNATE ROUTES FROM PASO DE FRANCIA TO NATCHITOCHES

The overall approach of alternative 1 would be to designate the routes from the Rio Grande (Maverick, Webb, and Zapata Counties, Texas) to Los Adaes, the first provincial capital of Texas, and on to Natchitoches, Louisiana (see alternative 1 map). This network of roads formed the major transportation corridor across south central Texas and northwestern Louisiana from the late 1600s to the mid-1800s. As El Camino Real, and including the later Old San Antonio Road, the routes illustrate a historical continuum of the nation's transportation and communication network set in the broad context of national and international politics and rivalries, exploration, acculturation, immigration, and settlement. The routes have national significance and extant resources with integrity, and they meet the eligibility criteria of the National Trails System Act.

Rationale and Significance

The route that is now known as El Camino Real de los Tejas began in 1689 as Spanish soldiers seeking to counter French intrusions into the reaches of Spain's frontier followed their Indian guides northeast from Paso de Francia. El Camino Real remained the route of subsequent expeditions through the 1720s and evolved over time as it was used by indigenous peoples, missionaries, settlers, and soldiers.

The segment known as the "Camino Pita," which extended from the Rio Grande to San Antonio, was used primarily from 1689 to 1727. Later several segments of the Pita Road became the Upper Presidio Road (1800–40).²⁷ Beyond San Antonio the route, which in this area was known as the Upper Road and El Camino de los Tejas, continued northeast through the current cities of New Braunfels and San Marcos. The Spanish first crossed the Colorado River just east of Austin in 1709, and by 1716 the route had been extended to enable the establishment of the missions in East Texas. The importance of this route lies in its having been the route used by explorers, early Texas settlers, and the founders and suppliers of the first missions and presidios. It is also important because it passed through the first capital of Los Adaes and the later capital of San Antonio.

In the 1720s the threat of Indian attacks forced Pita Road traffic to a route farther south. This new route, known as the Lower Presidio Road (1750–1800), went almost straight east from Paso de Francia before turning north to San Antonio, paralleling the Pita Road. The Lower Presidio Road was also known as Camino de en Medio because it lay between the Camino Pita and the Laredo-San Antonio Road.

During the 1720s the route east of San Antonio also began to shift south. This route, which became known as the Lower Road, followed the Rio de San Antonio downstream and turned east to cross the Guadalupe River near present day Cuero, joining with the Upper Road before

27. Santa Anna followed the Upper Presidio Road in 1836 as he approached San Antonio and the Alamo.

their common crossing of the Trinidad. The Lower Road to Los Adaes continued to be the main route to the northeast almost to the end of the 18th century, serving as a conduit for settlers, commerce, military units, missionaries, and Spanish culture. Collectively the Upper Road and the Lower Road formed the eastern part of El Camino Real.

Alternative 1 would include the designation of the two routes between Laredo and San Antonio, reflecting the shift of trade and traffic and the development of Laredo as a major center of trade and transportation. The routes from Laredo to San Antonio and Los Adaes connected to Monclova and Saltillo, just as did the earlier routes. Of the two routes between Laredo and San Antonio, one joined the Lower Presidio Road before approaching San Antonio; the other went first to La Bahía on the lower San Antonio River and then followed the river to San Antonio. In addition, a route from Villa de Dolores connected to the Laredo Road, which was a major route in the 1750s.

In 1795 a new mail road was opened from San Antonio to the northeast in the interest of straightening the route. This new, more direct route became known as the San Antonio Road (1795–1850).²⁸ The San Antonio Road used portions of both the earlier El Camino Real de los Tejas and the Upper and Lower roads but diverged from the older roads in places (particularly between San Marcos and Bryan and in Houston County).

The Old San Antonio Road is significant because of its vital role as a part of the longer immigration route that extended from the north and east (such as the Natchez Trace) and helped to open Texas to Euro-American settlement from 1795 to 1850. The road carried farm goods and livestock from the fledgling Texas settlements and brought in people, goods, and services. The Old San Antonio Road was also an important conduit for the military activities of Spain, Mexico, France, and the United States.

Together these multiple routes are known as El Camino Real de los Tejas. These routes reflect a broad spectrum of American history, beginning in the late 1600s and continuing to the mid-1800s. El Camino Real and its variations were the critical transportation corridors that enabled the settlement and development of the Spanish and French frontiers during the Spanish, Mexican, and early Anglo-American periods.

Management

Preservation strategies under alternative 1 would be focused on El Camino Real routes.²⁹ Many segments of the route of El Camino Real de los Tejas remain much as they were in the past. Trail remnants can be seen in some places, and trail river and stream crossings and major physical landmarks can also be identified. Along these routes are many resources, represented by archeological and historical sites related to civilian, religious, indigenous, and military life.

28. The route was also known as Camino de Arriba.

29. Specific route segments varied to adapt to the terrain and settlements.

Also included are natural and historic landscapes dating from the late 17th century to the mid-19th century. These archeological sites, ruins, and standing structures retain the integrity of place and feeling associated with the historic camino. However, across much of the area dense vegetation, tilled fields, and urban development have destroyed evidence of the trail.

When designating the route, Congress also would identify a lead federal agency to administer the trail in cooperation with a variety of day-to-day management partners, including state, local, and other federal agencies, American Indian tribes, local communities, private landowners, and others. El Camino Real de los Tejas would be managed through the National Park Service's Long Distance Trails Group Office in Santa Fe, which is a field unit of the NPS Intermountain Region. This Long Distance Trails Group Office manages the Santa Fe Trail, which passes through five states, and the Trail of Tears, which passes through nine states. The office also directs national historic trail feasibility studies. About 95% of the routes that are being considered for designation are in Texas, which is part of the NPS Intermountain Region.

The administrative activities would comprise preparing a comprehensive management and use plan; identifying sites and segments with significant potential for public use, recreational retracement, or historical interest; developing cooperative agreements; certifying qualified sites upon the request of site owners or managers; and stimulating, assisting, and coordinating preservation and interpretive activities of various government and nongovernmental organizations and private entities.

The administering agency also would develop a uniform marker and, where appropriate, mark the trail and an auto tour route; provide technical and limited financial assistance; assist with or conduct historical and archeological research; carry out monitoring and take actions to help ensure the preservation and quality of certified sites, segments, and facilities; manage the official logo for proper use; establish approaches to interpretation; and prepare interpretive materials.

The purpose of the comprehensive management and use plan would be to help achieve consistent and effective preservation, public use, and interpretive strategies. Section 5 (f) of the National Trails System Act identifies the following items to be addressed by the comprehensive management and use plan:

- (1) specific objectives and practices to be observed in the management of the trail, including the identification of all significant natural, historical, and cultural resources to be preserved (along with high potential historic sites and high potential route segments in the case of national historic trails), details of anticipated cooperative agreements to be consummated with other entities, and an identified carrying capacity of the trail and a plan for its implementation;
- (2) the process to be followed by the appropriate Secretary to implement the marking requirements established in . . . this act;
- (3) a protection plan for any high potential historic sites or high potential route segments; and
- (4) general and site-specific development plans, including anticipated costs.

The comprehensive management and use plan would include provisions to work cooperatively with state and local governments and landowners to help preserve the natural and cultural landscapes and resources along El Camino Real. These efforts could include the encouragement of continued cattle grazing and land uses that have helped to protect the undeveloped appearance of El Camino Real. In addition, the administering agency could offer programs to qualified organizations and property owners for any of the following purposes related to national historic trail designation:

- preservation
- research
- interpretation
- technical assistance
- limited financial assistance
- recognition programs for partners
- appropriate public use of sites
- volunteers in parks status for liability protection for qualifying landowners
- trail marking

The voluntary process for certifying sites along the proposed El Camino Real de los Tejas National Historic Trail would be similar to the process used for other national historic trails. Certified trail properties would be nonfederal historic sites, trail segments, and interpretive facilities that met the standards of the administering agency for resource preservation and public enjoyment. Certification is a partnership or a type of cooperative agreement that has the flexibility to meet the landowner's needs while ensuring protection and appropriate public use.

Specific actions on private lands would depend on efforts by the federal administering agency or other partners to provide incentives and on the interest of landowners and other partners in the development, protection, and interpretation of sites along the trail. The public lands along the trail offer many opportunities to provide for public use and the appreciation and enjoyment of El Camino Real de los Tejas.

The designation of El Camino Real de los Tejas would offer important preservation opportunities resulting from some provisions of the National Trails System Act. Designation would encourage further research to improve the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of trail segments and related sites and would promote the overall commemoration of the national significance of the trail. Technical assistance might be provided for documenting the significance of sites and identifying the most appropriate preservation techniques for preserving significant sites. Other assistance would help to stabilize and, where appropriate, restore significant resources for protection and interpretation.

The designation of El Camino Real de los Tejas as a unit of the national trails system would lead to opportunities to coordinate activities along the length of the trail. Designation also would enhance NPS efforts to coordinate with the Mexican and Spanish governments and others that might be interested in developing appropriate preservation and educational programs for trail resources, conducting research, and exchanging information and knowledge.

Interpretation

Interpretation refers to activities designed to convey important information, to educate, to reveal relationships related to natural and cultural resources, and to foster further inquiry, appreciation, and stewardship. The interpretation of El Camino Real de los Tejas would focus on three areas: the story and significance, the place and the landscape, and the people. Story and significance are listed together because they are essentially inseparable. The trail is significant because of its story. Whether stories are recorded in histories, oral traditions, memories, or customs, they are cultural resources.

From a distance a few significant segments of the landscape of the route of El Camino Real de los Tejas today generally resemble its appearance during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Designation as a national historic trail would give visitors the opportunity to retrace the historic route and see the similar patterns in the landscape today. River crossings would be some of the significant sites that could be accessible to visitors so that they would be able to appreciate what the early travelers of the route experienced.

The third focus for interpretation could be the stories of people. Oral histories, diaries, and historical research would be used to document more about the personal experiences of travelers along the routes.

Interpretive Themes. The following interpretive themes are the ideas, concepts, and stories that are central to the history, identity, and significance of El Camino Real de los Tejas. These are the primary, most important themes that could be used in interpretive programs so that all visitors would understand them. In addition to these themes, many other topics and stories would be interpreted.

- ◆ The trail was a major route for the settlement, acculturation, trade, military operations, and immigration from both the south and the east. The nature of trail activities and the specific route evolved with time to accommodate changing conditions and needs. El Camino Real was the route used for more than 150 years for Spanish exploration, settlement, military, and missionary travel into the areas that are now Texas and northwestern Louisiana. The Old San Antonio Road was used for more than 50 years for migration from the East to Texas.
- ◆ Indigenous people used the route of El Camino Real for more than 1,000 years. Archeological sites document that the trail was a major travel and transportation corridor between North America and Mesoamerica. Segments of what was to become El Camino Real were used extensively by various indigenous groups. The Spanish culture brought many benefits to indigenous people but also led to the loss of many aspects of those indigenous cultures. Spanish and indigenous cultures also blended, incorporating aspects from both into a new culture.

- ◆ The trail facilitated cultural exchange, diffusion, communication, and conflict among American Indians, Spanish, French, Mexicans, English, and Anglo-Americans. It represents the shared patrimony of nations and cultures.
- ◆ The evolving routes of El Camino Real were used to seek control of the lands adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico. The issue of control was not resolved until the southern and western boundaries of the United States were determined.

Interpretive Facilities and Media. Future planning efforts would identify interpretive facilities and media. Consistency would be needed in information, design, and visitor use guidelines. Media and program design should be accomplished with the involvement of interested and knowledgeable groups and individuals.

Facilities might include visitor centers, contact stations, and unattended kiosks. The federal administering agency normally would not construct or operate visitor facilities for the trail. The federal agency could provide interpretive media assistance (such as exhibits) if it was done in partnership with appropriate state and private organizations with broad public support and a demonstrated ability to raise the funds needed to build and operate such facilities. On the basis of the availability of funds the federal agency could provide technical and financial assistance to others in the planning, development, and overall approach to interpretation.

Exhibits would be an important means of telling the interpretive story. Exhibits could display and explain original and replica objects associated with the trail. Graphics could show various and distant landscapes and illustrate changes over centuries. Audiovisual programs, computers, interactive devices, models, dioramas, topographic models, or other media might join with objects, text, and graphics to tell stories and excite interest.

In partnership with others, the federal administering agency would develop an interpretive wayside exhibit system with waysides to be placed at appropriate points along the trail. A standardized exhibit design would be used to reflect the flavor of El Camino Real de los Tejas and to help reinforce the public's perception of an integrated national trail system. Wayside exhibits are outdoor panels that generally contain text and graphics. Waysides would be considered at any locations that met the following criteria: something important and interesting happened here, was here, or is visible from here; and the location is accessible and safe for visitors. Waysides could be placed at road pullouts, vistas, historic sites or features, or trailheads and along trails.

A variety of books, pamphlets, and site folders exist that interpret El Camino Real and related topics. Some advantages of publications are that they can be taken home after a visit, can be enjoyed at one's own pace, can interpret complex and sequential stories, and are often shared with others. Publications would be developed through partnerships and other arrangements.

Visitor Use Opportunities. A range of visitor use opportunities could be developed on public lands and private properties that have been certified with landowner concurrence with terms for public use. Such use would be managed so that there would not be any degradation of

archeological or historic sites. Existing trail systems could be expanded for hiking, wagon tours, and horseback riding. In addition, an auto tour route could be marked along parallel roads and highways.

Visitors could have opportunities east of San Antonio to drive on state highways (Texas Highway 21; Louisiana Highway 6) that in many places are in the same alignments as El Camino Real de los Tejas. West of San Antonio and at other points along the route, there are opportunities to see where the trail crossed major streams. These points are characterized by shoals or bedrock and less steep stream banks that facilitated crossing the stream.

Audiocassette tapes or special radio programs could be made available to help motorists better appreciate the history of the areas while driving.

Another opportunity would be to record and document the oral histories of families that are descendants of the travelers and settlers who used El Camino Real de los Tejas. Oral histories and ethnographic interviews would provide the connection to the families and the personal stories of people who traveled the trail, as well as those of indigenous people who have been affected by El Camino Real de los Tejas.

Besides retracing the trail, additional methods of experiencing El Camino Real de los Tejas could be explored. For example, areas of difficult access could be documented in video form and shared with people who are unable or unwilling to endure trail travel. Local community groups could become more involved in educating the public and promoting the preservation and appropriate use of resources associated with the trail. The public would have opportunities to take part in the following activities:

- retrace the trail in the United States at appropriate places by historic means: hiking, horseback riding, or riding in wagons, provided there would not be any adverse impact on trail resources

- participate in costumed interpretive programs and festivals

ALTERNATIVE 2: DESIGNATE TWO SEPARATE NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAILS, EL CAMINO REAL DE LOS TEJAS AND OLD SAN ANTONIO ROAD

Two separate trails would be proposed for designation under alternative 2: El Camino Real de los Tejas from the Rio Grande to Los Adaes and the Old San Antonio Road from Natchitoches to San Antonio. The overall approach of this alternative would be to separate the two distinctively different major themes, the time periods of significance, and the names for immigration, settlement, and travel across Texas and northwestern Louisiana (see Alternative 2 map; further detail is available in the separate segment maps that begin on page 13).

Each route that would be designated under this alternative is individually nationally significant and would qualify for designation as a national historic trail. The Laredo to San Antonio routes

would be included as part of El Camino Real de los Tejas. Alternative 2 reflects the technical definition of El Camino Real and not any later interpretations or uses of the route. It also would permit a clear separation of the Old San Antonio Road and its significance to the nation's history.

Route descriptions and a discussion of the overall significance of El Camino Real and the Old San Antonio Road were included in alternative 1. In alternative 2 each route would be considered separately, each with its own significance, resources, interpretation, and management. In this alternative El Camino Real is seen as a product of Spanish exploration and colonization between the 1680s and 1821. Spain dedicated a great deal of its resources and human energy to create and develop the route. In turn, the road network permitted the Spanish to assert control over the borderlands, both during the entradas and later as the missions and presidios and settlements were built. The route is significant because of the impacts of Spanish settlement and Christianization of American Indians.

Although some of the routes that would become the Old San Antonio Road were pioneered much earlier, this 19th century route is significant for its role in communication, trade, and immigration. Its significance is also tied to the connection to a much longer road system that was part of the peopling of Texas and northwestern Louisiana. The Old San Antonio Road played a vital role in the development of the Republic of Texas, the War with Mexico, and Texas statehood.

The distinction that would be afforded by the designation of two separate historic trails would offer a clearer way to tell the story of their respective histories. The overlapping segments could be managed as an integrated system.

Management

Under alternative 2 the management of El Camino Real de los Tejas and of the Old San Antonio Road would be much the same as the management described for alternative 1. However, with two separate designated national historic trails there would be increased recognition and visibility, as well as opportunities to work with partners to provide for public enjoyment and to interpret and protect segments of the routes.

Interpretation

Although much of the interpretation would be the same for this alternative as that described for alternative 1, interpretation in alternative 2 would be more narrowly focused to delineate the specific themes associated with each separate route.

ALTERNATIVE 3: NO ACTION (CONTINUATION OF EXISTING PROGRAMS)

If Congress decided not to designate El Camino Real de los Tejas or the Old San Antonio Road as a national historic trails, the current actions of agencies, organizations, and individuals could continue to help in the preservation and maintenance of a variety of trail routes and provide for public use. These routes could include any combination of the above alternatives. Trail preservation and use approaches could be managed as state and local governments were able, but the level of coordination and protection would be less than in the designation alternatives because there would not be a single agency directed and funded to help coordinate and protect the sites and segments of El Camino Real de los Tejas in Texas and Louisiana. Statewide initiatives such as the Texas heritage tourism program would help protect resources and provide for education.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT REJECTED

Several additional routes were considered to be recommended for designation, but each was rejected for reasons briefly mentioned below (see map: Alternative Routes Considered but Rejected).

The road to San Sabá from San Antonio (that is, the route to the San Sabá Mission) was considered for inclusion in this study, but that possibility was rejected. The route does not connect Spanish provincial capitals and was used over a very short time, from about 1750 to 1760.

The road from Natchitoches to Natchez was one of the principal routes for immigration and trade that connected to El Camino Real de los Tejas. Further research would be required to document the location of this route and to identify archeological and historic sites directly associated with the route.

Connecting routes to Los Adaes extended north and northwest, but these routes would not have been El Camino Real. The road north from Los Adaes is one of the Caddo Indian routes that appears on a 1767 map of the Los Adaes area (Avery 1995, 13). At this time, not enough is known about the specific location of these routes to be included in this study. Other 16th century routes extended to the northwest. (Also see Kelley 1995, 32, and Geographical, Statistical, and Historical map 1832.)

The road from La Bahía to Orcoquisac was used to bring supplies to the coastal mission of Orcoquisac. While this colonial road was important, it did not connect Spanish provincial capitals, it was not used over a long period of time, and it is not nationally significant.

A 17th century exploration route (the upper extension of La Bahía Road) meets the Old San Antonio Road at Midway and Lower Camino Real at La Grange. This segment was an Indian trail that was followed by 17th century explorations, but it did not become part of the 18th

century Camino Real. It came to be used again in the 19th century as part of La Bahía Road, but it was separate from the Old San Antonio Road.

Many of these routes may have local and regional significance as historic routes, but they are not nationally significant because of having been used for a limited time or infrequently or because the types of use were limited. It would have been more difficult to explain and convey to visitors the significance of the Rio Grande to Natchitoches segment of El Camino Real de los Tejas because of the number of other routes that would have been designated. If El Camino Real de los Tejas was designated, interpretation could address the historical development of the colonial network of roads that connected with El Camino Real de los Tejas. The story of the trail could emphasize the network of routes that connected colonial sites in a wide region. Individual segments of this colonial road network that have direct association with El Camino Real de los Tejas might be locally marked and associated with national historic trail programs.

RECOMMENDED NAME FOR THE ROUTE

The legislation authorizing this study directed that the study “consider alternative name designations for the trail.” Factors to be considered were how widespread was the historical use of the name, how well does the name describe the route proposed for designation and differentiate the proposed route from other routes, and how well would the proposed trail name would fit on a standard national historic trail sign.

Several names were considered for recommendation: Camino de los Tejas, El Camino Real, Pita Road, Lower Presidio Road, Upper Presidio Road, Camino de en Medio, Camino de Arriba, and the Old San Antonio Road.

El Camino Real alone is a general and widely used term. Some of the above names would have been favored by different travelers during the various periods of trail use. Some names referred to specific geographic segments. For example, El Camino de la Plata was used exclusively in Mexico north of Mexico City for the route to the silver mines of Guanajuato, Zacatecas, and Durango; the name never applied to the segment under study. El Camino Real is the name that New Mexican Governor Vargas called the road in 1692. El Camino Real de los Tejas was used to differentiate this route from other royal routes to California and New Mexico.

It is recommended that the trail name be “El Camino Real de los Tejas,” a title that is more grammatically correct than “El Camino Real para los Texas” (the name that was used in the legislation that authorized this study). The research for this study has indicated that this is the most common and appropriate name for this route. Referring to the road as “Camino Real” after 1821 is technically incorrect because the route was no longer a Spanish royal road. However, the overall significance of the trail and its human interaction evolved from the Spanish colonial period, so for the purpose of naming the national historic trail, “El Camino Real de los Tejas” is most appropriate.

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The period of significance for the trail extends from just before European exploration and settlement to a period after the independence of Mexico from Spain in 1821. The names of the trail that were used after Mexican independence would be part of the interpretive story of El Camino Real de los Tejas.

The recommended name differentiates the routes in Texas and Louisiana from other *caminos reales* that may be considered for possible designation as national historic trails, such as El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro (in New Mexico and western Texas). If Congress chooses to designate El Camino Real de los Tejas as a national historic trail, the comprehensive management and use plan would include consideration of a variety of trail logo designs incorporating the name (possibly abbreviated) within the size limitations of the design format for the standard national historic trail marker.